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1 Ian Reader is a well-known specialist of religion in modern Japan, and of pilgrimage in particular. His latest opus is a significant contribution not only to the study of pilgrimage, but also to contemporary religion in general. The book opens with a description of the 1000th anniversary of the important Saikoku pilgrimage route that was celebrated and publicised by the means of a travelling exhibition in department stores in Western Japan in 1987. It allowed among other things that "pilgrims" complete a microcosmic version of the pilgrimage by standing on slabs filled with earth extracted from the various sites and praying to an icon. Pilgrims could tour the exhibition before or after shopping, with a majority being clearly happy to be able to fit all these activities into an afternoon.

2 This example introduces to the book's core argument, which is to challenge the opposition between pure, sacred, austere, and solemn "real religion", and base, noisy, tacky, and degrading consumption and market activities. Rather than being a welcomed rupture with the marketplace, pilgrimages are inextricably tied to it: "A key aim of this book is to challenge the tendency in pilgrimage studies to portray the dynamics of the marketplace as disjunctions from pilgrimage's 'true' and sacred nature. By contrast, I argue that [...] the dynamics of the marketplace, with its themes of pilgrimages being promoted, reshaped, invented and exhibited to increase their

custom, along with issues of consumerism and the acquisition of material goods and souvenirs, are not antithetical to pilgrimage (or to 'religion')." (p. 14-15)

3 Already in Medieval Venice (and probably well before), entrepreneurial and political interests and investments have provided support structures that have made pilgrimages possible and accessible, sometimes favouring some to the detriment of others, which disappeared as a consequence. With the development of transport and, later, media technologies, pilgrimages became massified and democratized in the course of the twentieth century, exemplified by the French state-owned train company SNFC's promotion of Lourdes. Pilgrimages are not timeless, unchanged phenomena. Their histories are embedded in wider social, cultural, economic, and political currents. The twentieth century tended to favour inscription of pilgrimages within national narratives and the promotion of 'authentic' national identities. As for the more recent transformations brought on by economic and cultural globalisation, Reader argues that the consumerist, marketing and tourist orientations have become intensified. It is an important contribution of this book to have tried to define recent changes in Japan and elsewhere. For one, the nation no longer seems to be the natural container for pilgrimages, which now tend to market and promote themselves (namely through active involvement of political authorities, regional entrepreneur associations, and the tourism industry) globally, including to new "market segments" such as backpackers, hikers, bus tours, as well as, increasingly, the wealthy. The short discussion on how Santiago de Compostella's strategy of recognition by UNESCO as a world heritage site serves as a model for other pilgrimage routes such as Shikoku is instructive. Also worth mentioning is how sites such as Lourdes and others have tended in the last few years to downplay miracles and remove the walls of crutches and other paraphernalia in favour of more "modern" and less "superstitious" façades. Pilgrimage in the "neoliberal age" (Martikainen and Gauthier (eds.), *Religion in the Neoliberal Age. Modes of Governance and Political Economy*. Farnham, 2013) becomes sanitised, streamlined and inscribed within a hedonistic register of signification, providing a remarkable example of the transformations of religion in the age of global consumer capitalism.

4 The person who thinks how wonderful it is to be able to purchase a singing toilet paper roll holder from Lourdes is not a dupe and a gullible "backwoods ignoramus duped by the commercially astute vendors and the manipulative Catholic overseers of Lourdes". Rather, he grasps the "deep connections between religion and material culture and an awareness of how closely embedded in the marketplace pilgrimages and pilgrimage sites are" (p. 168). While developing the argument that economic and mundane aspects are integral to pilgrimages and sacred spaces in general, Reader importantly restrains from slipping into a utilitarian anthropology in which actors are only self-interested and motivated by maximizing economic, social or cultural "capital", as in Bourdieu's sociology. Implicitly following Marcel Mauss' seminal *Essay on the gift*, actors are both self-interested and altruistic in Reader's account. Hence the entrepreneurial attitude of certain pilgrimage sites, as well as that of connected businesses are presented by Reader as being not only motivated by profit, but also in working towards a greater good, in *giving* something to a higher cause (p. 90): "none of them was operating simply in a cynical business fashion, with their eyes fixed solely on moneymaking and on viewing pilgrims (and the wider public) as potential customers to be fleeced so that they could become rich" (p. 81). Similarly, although worldly benefits, accumulation of merit and status acquisition are more part of pilgrim motivations than hopes of miracles, they also engage in consumption of souvenirs – for example in order to bring

back gifts to friends and family, thereby relating the "extraordinary" experience of pilgrimage to "ordinary" life and its set of values and meaningful social bonds.

5 The eight chapters that form this book do not cut up the issues and themes in neat sub-ensembles, but rather thread the main arguments mentioned above from slightly different perspectives and angles. Yet this lack of a systematic analytical treatment does not hinder the richness of the whole. The book does unfortunately lack in depth as pertains to theoretical issues. As concerns the way in which crowds attract crowds, one can mourn the absence of a discussion that would refer to Durkheim, for instance, and the social production of sacralised objects and symbols. Also, Reader continuously critiques a sharp and absolute distinction between "the sacred" and "the profane", arguing for instance that souvenirs bought outside a temple are considered the same as those bought within the vicinity. On many occasions, Reader criticises the concept of "the sacred" and questions whether it is a "viable category", yet uses it repeatedly. The material described in this book would have provided an excellent basis to argue in favour of a refreshed concept of "sacred" not as a substantive but an adjective (as in Durkheim and Mauss). What is "sacred" is always a social construction. It is always "sacralised". It is furthermore dependent on the perspective adopted: the temple is sacred with respect to the souvenir shop (it's entrance is a limen), but the souvenir shop beside it participates in its sacrality by contagion, in opposition to whatever lies further away. In addition, the sacred vs. profane division sometimes functions topically (something is either one or the other), and sometimes there are gradations in sacrality, as Hubert and Mauss showed in their classic *Essay on Sacrifice*. In other words, Reader's reference to "the" sacred (and profane) seems to me outdated and a bit of a caricature, as well as unfortunately unrooted from some classic works that could prove pertinent and actual.